

Karpal: Charge Penang's Azhar with sedition
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Veteran parliamentarian Karpal Singh wants Penang Opposition Leader Azhar Ibrahim to be punished for the seditious statement he made to the state assembly sitting in May.

Yesterday, the legislature suspended Azhar for six months.

NONEKarpal (left) said Azhar's suspension "brings into sharp focus the need for the attorney-general to act in the public interest" by taking Azhar to task under the 1948 Sedition Act.

"The federal constitution and all state constitutions have an amendment included after the May 1969 riots for sedition to be subjected to criminal prosecution, even if the words are uttered in the course of proceedings in Parliament or state assemblies.

"In other words, absolute immunity from legal process, which was the order of the day before the amendments, made sedition an exception to that immunity," he explained.

Even if Azhar retracted his words later, Karpal said, it would not matter as the law had to take its course.

The Bukit Gelugor MP, who is also a prominent lawyer, referred to the sedition charge against him for publicly stating that the Perak Sultan could be taken to court for his decisions in the crisis that led to the fall of the Pakatan Rakyat government in Perak last year.

"The AG did not spare me from undergoing a criminal charge, which could have resulted in my disqualification as an MP, had I not been acquitted after a lengthy trial this year.

Azhar shouldn't get a away with a tap on the wrist

"Of course, the AG is still seeking for a pound of my flesh and more than a pint of my blood by appealing against my acquittal," he said, but stressed that there should not be selective prosecution, since Azhar is an Umno leader.

He also said that he was "surprised" why the Penang state assembly did not immediately refer the matter to the police and urged Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng to lodge a report soon.

"It will not require an exhaustive or lengthy police investigation, since whatever that was uttered in the assembly is recorded in the Hansard," he noted.

"If the attorney-general (does not charge Azahar), he would be abdicating his duty and function as the protector of public interests... let this not be a precedent for others of the ilk of Azhar to defy the law and get away with only a tap on their wrists," urged Karpal.